

### Taking Stock: The Focal Points of Abe's Foreign Policy

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## Im Fokus

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### ***Taking Stock: The Focal Points of Abe's Foreign Policy***

### ***Ein Jahr japanische Außenpolitik unter Shinzō Abe: Eine Bilanz***

Frank A. Stengel

#### **Abstract**

In September 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe resigned after only one year in office. Abe, who had been Chief Cabinet Secretary in the cabinet of Jun'ichirō Koizumi, had gained popularity mainly because of his tough stance towards North Korea, in particular concerning the abduction issue. During Abe's premiership, foreign policy remained his forte. This article examines the continuities and discontinuities of Abe's and Koizumi's foreign policies. Overall, Abe has continued with Koizumi's agenda of "normalising" Japan's foreign policy. In spite of his reputation as an ultranationalist and revisionist, however, he has made serious efforts to repair Japan's strained relations with China and South Korea, which had deteriorated due to Koizumi's regular visits to the Yasukuni shrine. Furthermore, Abe has fostered strategic relations with India and Australia, and worked to further deepen the alliance with the United States.<sup>1</sup>

*Keywords: Japan, foreign policy, Abe, Koizumi*

#### **Introduction**

On September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007, after only one year in office, Shinzō Abe surprisingly resigned as Prime Minister, sending a "shock wave" (NNI, 18/9/07) throughout Japan. After a series of political scandals had led to an astounding defeat of his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the July 2007 upper house elections (cf. Köllner 2007), Abe at first announced his intention to stay in power. However, facing the Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) fierce opposition to the extension

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of the controversial Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law (ATSML) as well as the imminent publication of an article in the Japanese weekly *Shūkan gendai* investigating the finances of Abe's support organisation, threatening to uncover another political scandal, he resigned not even two months later (J.A., 5/2007: 101-102; *The Guardian* 2007).

Abe had succeeded Jun'ichirō Koizumi with high approval ratings, setting out a bold agenda including the revision of the constitution and improvements to Japan's education and civil service systems. Before succeeding Koizumi as Prime Minister, Abe had been Secretary-General of the LDP and Chief Cabinet Secretary in the Koizumi cabinet. Foreign policy had always been his forte, and he has gained popularity mainly because of his tough stance towards North Korea, in particular with respect to the abduction issue. It is the aim of this article to provide an overview of the central focal points of Japanese foreign policy during the Abe premiership. To what extent does Abe's approach present a continuation of Koizumi's foreign policy, and to what extent does it depart from it?

This analysis proceeds as follows: Firstly, I will examine Japan's policies towards its immediate neighbours, North Korea, China and South Korea. In the subsequent part, Japan's respective nascent strategic relationship with India and Australia will be addressed as well as the alliance with the United States (US). I will conclude by giving a summary of the central focal points of Abe's foreign policy and provide a cautious outlook about what to expect from Abe's successor Yasuo Fukuda.

## Turning Around Japan's "Neighbourhood Policy"

### The Strained Relations with North Korea

In Japan's dealings with North Korea, two topics loom large: North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons tests and the abductions issue. These issues will be addressed in more detail below. Since the early 1990s, the United States had been concerned about North Korea's nuclear programme, and Japan has shared this concern to a varying degree. As the result of Pyongyang's 1993 test launch of a Nodong-1 missile over the Sea of Japan, which demonstrated the vulnerability of significant parts of Japan to a ballistic missile attack, North Korea was increasingly seen as a security concern in Tokyo. However, since the first North Korean nuclear crisis, Japan proved – despite US requests – to be reluctant to put military pressure on Pyongyang and instead pursued a policy of engagement

towards North Korea via the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO), in line with South Korea's "sunshine policy".<sup>2</sup> Supplementing these multilateral efforts, Tokyo has approached Pyongyang in bilateral initiatives. Then, in 1998, Pyongyang fired a Taepodong-1 missile over Japanese airspace, rendering Japan's exposure to ballistic missile attacks undeniable and significantly heightening the Japanese public's threat perception. This led to increased difficulties for Tokyo to keep up its strategy of engagement towards North Korea, particularly since incidents increased of suspicious ships entering Japanese waters. Japanese threat perceptions were raised by the so-called second nuclear crisis in 2002/03, when Pyongyang admitted to a secret nuclear weapons programme and withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

Prime Minister Koizumi, who came to power in 2001, dealt with the North Korean threat with a mixed strategy of engagement and containment. On the one hand, Tokyo has taken steps to balance Pyongyang by embarking on a far-reaching reformulation of its post-Cold War security policy (Bleiker 2003; Hughes 2004).<sup>3</sup> Koizumi took steps to strengthen the US-Japan alliance, most notably through Japan's active participation in the US "global war on terrorism" (GWOT), in order to assure US support in countering the North Korean threat (Hughes 2007). In addition to that, Japan has embarked on a wide-reaching force reconstruction, developing power-projection capabilities for all its military branches. Furthermore, North Korea has been an important factor in Tokyo's decision to acquire ballistic-missile defence (BMD) systems, prominent in Japan's revised 2004 National Defence Programme Guidelines. After Pyongyang's multiple test missile launches in July 2006, Tokyo has striven to speed up cooperation with the US on BMD deployment (Hughes/Krauss 2007). Despite his efforts to balance the North Korean threat, Koizumi worked with South Korea to convince the US to enter into direct negotiations with Pyongyang, and since 2003 Japan has participated in the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programme (Hughes 2004). The Prime Minister combined these multilateral

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<sup>2</sup> The so-called "sunshine policy" refers to South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's policy of cooperative engagement towards Pyongyang (cf. e.g. Gerschewski 2007).

<sup>3</sup> The North Korean threat, of course, is not the only reason for Japan's changed security policy. China's economic rise and military build-up as well as the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 (9/11), have played a significant role as well. However, North Korea presents the most immediate threat to Japanese national security and thus has to be seen as a crucial factor in bringing about this development (cf. Hughes 2007).

efforts with bilateral initiatives of engagement, most notably visiting North Korea in 2002 and 2004 to reboot bilateral normalisation negotiations (Hughes/Krauss 2007). The main rationale behind the trips to Pyongyang was the attempt to find a diplomatic solution to the so-called abduction issue, which refers to the still unclear whereabouts of most of the (according to Tokyo) overall 17 Japanese citizens that North Korean agents kidnapped in the 1970s and 1980s, forcing them to work as language instructors for spies. North Korea maintains that despite five abductees, who returned to Japan in 2002, all other missing persons had died. Tokyo adheres to the assumption that further abductees remain in North Korea and demands their return as well as the handover of the kidnappers and a full clarification of the issue (J.A., 5/2007: 95-96; NNI, 7/9/07).

In contrast to Koizumi, who has not only balanced but also engaged Pyongyang, Abe has pursued a decidedly tougher policy towards North Korea. Even prior to assuming office, Abe has been well known for his uncompromising position, in particular with respect to the abduction issue. He became popular in 2002 when he accompanied Koizumi on his trip to Pyongyang and urged him not to sign the Japan-DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) Pyongyang Declaration. When his opposition became known to the public, Abe emerged as a "political star" (Edström 2007: 26). After Koizumi's resignation, Abe placed his bid for the premiership mainly on his tough stance on the abduction issue. Of all people it was North Korea's dictator Kim Jong Il who on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006, played in Abe's hands by test-firing another seven missiles. Abe, at that time Chief Cabinet Secretary, led other conservative politicians in denouncing the missile test and reasserted Japan's right to preventive strikes. This tough reaction supported Abe's position compared to his more moderate main contender Yasuo Fukuda who subsequently withdrew his (not yet official) candidacy (Edström 2007; Hughes 2004; IISS 2007). During Abe's premiership, the abductions have remained his pet issue, and he has been able to gather US support for the Japanese position (J.A., 5/2007: 95-96; NNI, 2/11/07). However, his insistence that the matter be discussed within the framework of the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programme has hampered his ability to influence the negotiations (Mochizuki 2007a).

Abe's attitude towards Pyongyang even hardened on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006, when the information reached him of the first North Korean nuclear test. Abe was on his way from Beijing to Seoul at the time, and the nuclear test dominated bilateral talks with South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun. Abe made clear

that the incident was not tolerable and announced that Japan would not only push for the United Nations (UN) to adopt sanctions but would also impose unilateral sanctions against Pyongyang – an announcement which Tokyo swiftly implemented. Furthermore, Abe has used the incident to further push his reform agenda for the defence sector, and the nuclear test led to a heightened debate in the media about whether Japan should acquire its own nuclear deterrent (ST, 22/8/07). Aware of the danger of setting off an arms race, however, Abe moved quickly to confirm Japan's non-nuclear stance (Hughes/Krauss 2007; Shim 2006).<sup>4</sup>

### Repairing Neighbourly Relations: China and South Korea

When Koizumi resigned as Prime Minister, the relations to Japan's neighbours, most notably China and South Korea, were at a low. In part, this is due to unresolved issues of Japan's wartime and colonial history. Furthermore, Japan is still entangled in territorial disputes with China as well as with South Korea, and despite increasing economic interdependence between Japan and China, the latter's rise as an economic power and its military build-up combined with the Taiwan issue are one of Japan's two most important security concerns (Hughes 2004; Mochizuki 2007b). Aside from these factors, during Koizumi's term, Japan's political relations to Beijing and Seoul further deteriorated due to the Prime Minister's regular visits to the controversial Yasukuni shrine. The shrine, commemorating Japan's war dead, is highly disputed because it includes a number of Class-A war criminals convicted by the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal set up after the Asia-Pacific war (cf. Richter 2007). Koizumi's visits in his capacity as Prime Minister were perceived in Beijing and Seoul as an attempt to "whitewash" past aggressions (Jiang 2007: 16) and aroused a wave of international protests. Beijing cut off all summit meetings, and in 2003 anti-Japanese incidents began to break out in China, which in 2005 peaked in violent anti-Japanese demonstrations in several Chinese cities. Although Koizumi apologized for Japan's war history, bilateral relations remained poisoned (Berger 2007; Katz/Ennis 2007). As in the case of China, Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni shrine triggered widespread

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<sup>4</sup> In fact the Japanese debate about nuclear weapons is very limited and seems, as then Deputy Press Secretary Tomohiko Taniguchi pointed out in October 2006, more like "a debate about whether or not Japan should really debate the matter" (Taniguchi 2006: 7). On Japan's (lack of) inclination to pursue nuclear weapons, cf. Izumi/Furukawa 2007.

protests in South Korea. Furthermore, Seoul suspended military-to-military dialogue, temporarily recalled its ambassador and banned the import of Japanese cultural items. In turn, a Korean campaign to rename the Sea of Japan to the East Sea and the issuing of a postal stamp commemorating the Tokdo/Takeshima Islands, which are disputed between the two states, aroused Japanese protests. This led to renewed debates about Japan's colonial rule over the Korean peninsula. In April 2006, the quarrel even culminated in South Korea threatening the use of force against survey ships from the Japanese Maritime Safety Agency to be dispatched in reaction to the South Korean announcement to rename the Sea of Japan (Berger 2007; Edström 2007; Katz/Ennis 2007).

While Koizumi had alienated Beijing and Seoul, Abe proved to be much more willing to compromise in his dealings with Japan's neighbours. At first glance, this seems surprising given that Abe is a conservative with rather hawkish and revisionist views on foreign policy and history issues (Hughes/Krauss 2007). Abe is an advocate of a more patriotic, stronger and "normal" Japan and had in the past been a "staunch defender of Prime Minister Koizumi's right to visit the Yasukuni shrine" (Edström 2007: 71). Pursuing the goal to abolish the "post-war regime", Abe called for a revision of the Japanese constitution, the strengthening of Japan's military and the adding of more patriotic content to history textbooks, less critical of Japan's war-time aggression. During the contest to succeed Koizumi, Abe was seen as the right candidate for those who perceived China as a threat and deemed it necessary to stand up to what was perceived as "Chinese bullying" (Edström 2007: 44; Jiang 2007). Nevertheless, as it became likely for Abe to succeed Koizumi and domestic and international pressure on the government to improve relations with Japan's neighbours increased, Abe softened his stance on the Yasukuni issue and refused to give a clear answer if he would visit the shrine if elected (Jiang 2007). Moreover, on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006, Abe announced that he would adhere to then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's 1995 statement, in which he apologized for Japan's colonial rule and wartime atrocities. Murayama's statement is regarded as the "farthest act of remorse ever expressed by a Japanese politician in contemporary history" (Cheow 2006: 28).

Only a few days after assuming office, on 8-9 October 2006, Abe went to Beijing to meet with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao, which had been secretly negotiated prior to his inauguration (Katz/Ennis 2007). The fact that the trip preceded Japanese Prime Ministers' traditional visit to Washington

has to be seen as a conciliatory gesture “wrought with intense symbolism in Far Eastern diplomacy, which the Chinese and South Koreans would have clearly noted and appreciated” (Cheow 2006: 28). The Sino-Japanese summit meeting dramatically improved bilateral relations, and in the joint press statement the two countries stated that they had agreed to “overcome the political obstacle” of the Yasukuni issue (NNI, 8/10/06). Abe in turn announced that he would handle the matter “appropriately” in the future but – due to the complicated domestic dynamics surrounding the issue – refused any clearer statement with respect to future visits (Jiang 2007: 25). The two countries announced that they would “face past history squarely, advance towards the future” and “strive to build a mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests” (MOFA 2006). Hu and Abe both expressed common concern over the pending North Korean nuclear weapons test and agreed to work closely on that issue as well as to resolve the East China Sea dispute surrounding China’s development of gas fields which Tokyo fears could drain away Japan’s deposits (Jiang 2007; NNI, 18/11/06). Another positive sign was Beijing’s and Tokyo’s agreement to conduct joint research on Sino-Japanese wartime history (Jiang 2007). Furthermore, Abe went out of his way to appreciate Chinese leadership in the six-party talks, another gesture that has been valued highly by Beijing (Edström 2007; Hughes/Krauss 2007). Sino-Japanese relations further improved with Wen’s three-day trip to Japan in April 2007 (J.A., 3/2007: 100-101). In the first speech ever given by a Chinese Premier to the Japanese Diet, Wen emphasised that “[t]he length, scale and influence of China-Japan friendly exchanges are rarely seen in the course of world civilization” (FMPRC 2007). He furthermore recognized Japan’s apologies for its past aggression in Asia but also emphasized that Japan now needed to walk the talk (JT, 13/4/07). Wen avoided addressing specific political and historical issues which had strained bilateral ties in the past, like the unresolved territorial disputes, the 1937 Nanjing massacre or the so-called “comfort women”, forced to work as sex slaves in brothels run by the Japanese Imperial Army during the Second World War. Due to the avoidance of contentious topics, both sides could declare the meeting a success and announced that the two countries would advance to build a “strategic relationship based on common interests” (Edström 2007: 64).

Following his visit to Beijing in October 2006, Abe went to Seoul to meet with South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun. Koizumi’s visits to the Yasukuni shrine had worsened the already complicated bilateral relations with South Korea. Thus,



when Abe arrived in Seoul to repair bilateral relations, he was in for some heavy lifting. Ironically, it was North Korea's "great leader" Kim Jong Il who (again) came to Abe's rescue. On his way from the airport, the information reached Abe that North Korea had conducted a nuclear weapons test. The test came as a shock, and consequently, the common threat posed by Pyongyang dominated the summit. The North Korean nuclear test demonstrated that the different strategies of the US, Japan, South Korea and China had not worked out and threatened the nuclear non-proliferation system. Already in the press conference after the Sino-Japanese summit meeting, Abe had stressed that a potential North Korean nuclear test would not be tolerable and posed a grave threat to other states in the region. He called for consultations among the US, South Korea and China on how to react to the test, and President Roh said that South Korea would find it increasingly difficult to continue with its "sunshine policy" towards the North (Edström 2007). In spite of the nuclear test dominating the summit, Roh, unlike Beijing, brought up the common history and called for Abe to address topics like the Yasukuni shrine and the "comfort women". Abe repeated his Beijing statement that he would handle the Yasukuni issue "appropriately" and distanced himself from his own statements in the past when he had denied the existence of sex slaves by announcing that his government would adhere to Chief Cabinet Secretary Yōhei Kōno's 1993 statement that admitted the use of sex slaves by the Japanese military during the Second World War (Edström 2007: 59). Hopes for a Japanese-Korean détente further increased as Tokyo announced its support for then Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon's candidacy for the succession of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (Shim 2006).

Abe's forgoing to visit the Yasukuni shrine during his term has helped to reduce tensions with Japan's neighbours. However, a lot of historical and political issues remain to be resolved and continue to lurk in the background. Thus, fears of increasing tensions with South Korea and China resurfaced when Abe claimed in March 2007 that with respect to the "comfort women", there was no evidence for the use of "coercion in a narrow sense" by the Japanese military (NNI, 17/9/07; WSJ, 21/4/07). The remark shows that Abe has difficulties in "restraining his revisionist views" (Hughes/Krauss 2007: 170), and the immediate flare-up of criticism in the media forced him to "bend over backwards" (Edström 2007: 76) and to apologize repeatedly (BBC News 2007).

## **Building New Alliances, Improving the Old One?**

### **Fostering Strategic Relations with India and Australia**

Already during his campaign to succeed Koizumi, Abe called for a strategic alliance among the democracies of the region (Edström 2007). As a part of his agenda and building on initiatives of his predecessors, most notably Yoshirō Mori and Koizumi, Prime Minister Abe has sought to further deepen strategic relations with India (Jain 2007). During Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Japan in December 2006, the two heads of government agreed to improve bilateral relations and to move towards a strategic and global partnership through intensified economic, political and security cooperation. Singh expressed understanding for Japanese concern about North Korea's nuclear weapons test as well as the abduction issue and lobbied for Japanese support for the "U.S.-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Pact", aimed at US support for the development of an Indian nuclear programme for civilian purposes. A sign for the progressive partnership between India and Japan was a one-day joint navy manoeuvre conducted three weeks later together with US forces. India-Japan relations received another boost in August 2007, when Abe went on a one-week trip to Indonesia, India and Malaysia. At the centre of Abe's meeting with his counterpart Singh were bilateral economic relations as well as defence cooperation. In his speech to the Indian parliament, Abe emphasized the two countries' friendship and strategic partnership and called for India's participation in a wider Asian partnership, including the US and Australia. Abe was the first foreign statesman to receive the honour to speak to the Indian parliament since US President Bill Clinton's visit to India in 2000. During a meeting of the two countries' defence ministers, India and Japan agreed on a 37-point programme on strategic cooperation, in particular on sea-lane security, exchanges in defence issues and regular meetings of navy officials. In September 2007, the two countries participated in a joint navy manoeuvre in the Bay of Bengal, together with Australia, the US and Singapore (J.A., 1/2007: 85-86, 3/2007: 98-99, 5/2007: 98-99; Mansingh 2007; Scott 2007).

There are political, economic and strategic reasons for closer ties between India and Japan. Economically, both countries can profit significantly from closer cooperation, as Japan is rich in high technology and investment capital, whereas India has a young and well educated work force, which can complement Japan's ageing population. India is also keen to gather Japanese support for its civilian

nuclear programme, and a Japanese recognition of India as a nuclear power opens up opportunities for Japanese firms in the energy sector. Abe's visits to India suggested his readiness to accept it as a nuclear power. However, that would contradict Tokyo's non-proliferation and disarmament policies, as India is neither a signatory to the NPT nor to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and Abe has been careful to avoid addressing the issue in public. In political terms, India and Japan share common values like democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Both countries aspire to secure a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Furthermore, Japan is Asia's biggest donor of foreign aid, and thus could be an ally in India's efforts to stabilise its economically underdeveloped neighbours. Finally, the two countries share common strategic goals like access to energy sources, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, sea-lane security and the fight against terrorism. Furthermore, Tokyo is concerned about a rising China whose influence India could help contain. While New Delhi and Tokyo are cautious not to alienate China publicly, in particular in association with the two countries' joint manoeuvres, the swift upgrading of China's naval forces is met with concern in Japanese policy circles (J.A., 1/2007: 85-86, 3/2007: 98-99, 5/2007: 98-99; Hirabayashi 2007; Mansingh 2007; ST, 23, 25/8/07; Toki 2007).

Abe has also been tightening Japan's strategic relations with Australia. During Prime Minister John Howard's trip to Tokyo in March 2007, Japan and Australia signed the "Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation". The historic declaration envisages a closer cooperation between the two countries on a number of issues, including North Korea, counterterrorism and non-proliferation, elevating Australia to Japan's second most important ally. During his visit, Prime Minister Howard emphasized Japan's role as Australia's most reliable partner in the region. The two countries' armed forces have already gathered experiences in a number of joint missions, among them the UN peacekeeping operation in Cambodia in 1992 and in the Iraq war of 2003. Thus far, however, security cooperation has taken place within the framework of both countries' bilateral alliances with the United States, most notably in the context of joint naval exercises and in the fields of BMD and non-proliferation. The bilateral declaration has increased Tokyo's diplomatic independence from the United States (WSJ, 15/3/07). Although Tokyo and Canberra were quick to announce that the increased security cooperation was not directed against China, in fact the People's Republic is as much a factor behind the tightened relations as are North Korea's

nuclear ambitions, since Canberra shares Tokyo's and Washington's suspicion of China's military build-up (J.A., 2/2007: 104-105; Sakaeda 2007b; Taylor 2007; WSJ, 15/3/07; Yamamoto 2007). In September 2007, Abe and Howard met again on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Sydney. The two heads of government adopted an action plan strengthening cooperation in various fields, ranging from the abduction issue and North Korea's nuclear programme over UN reforms, law enforcement and border control to non-proliferation, peacekeeping and humanitarian relief missions, in order for the two countries to "make [a] further contribution to regional and global peace and stability", as Abe pointed out (NNI, 9/9/07).

### **A Koizumi Sequel? Abe and the US-Japan Alliance**

Apart from fostering strategic relations with India and Australia, Abe has also worked to strengthen Japan's traditional alliance with the US. When Prime Minister Koizumi stepped down, speculations were expressed that this might have a negative affect on US-Japanese ties, which had reached an unprecedented closeness. Koizumi and US President George W. Bush were connected by a close personal friendship (Cossa 2007; Green 2006; ST, 1/10/07).<sup>5</sup> His successor Abe has made clear that maintaining a close relationship with Washington based on common values is one of his key priorities. After his first meeting with Bush on the sidelines of the 2006 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Hanoi, Abe pointed out that the US and Japan "share an alliance which is based on fundamental values, such as freedom, democracy, basic human rights and the rule of law" (The White House 2006). He reiterated this position during his April 2007 visit to Washington and announced that it was his declared aim to "reaffirm the irreplaceable Japan-U.S. alliance, and to grow this stronger as an unshakable alliance" (The White House 2007a). Abe's strong emphasis on US-Japan relations is not surprising, given the fact that as Cabinet Secretary, he was instrumental in pushing through the legislation to allow for the Self Defence Forces' (SDF) deployment to Iraq (Green 2006; Taniguchi 2006). Consequently, Abe continued Koizumi's course of strengthening cooperation with the US.

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<sup>5</sup> However, as Michael Green has pointed out, the strategic convergence between the two states began before Koizumi assumed office, and the close personal relationship between Koizumi and Bush was "as much a reflection of the closer strategic, ideational, and economic convergence of the United States and Japan in the twenty-first century as it was the cause" (Green 2006: 109).

Reacting to the changing security environment, Abe aims to “move Japan beyond the post-war regime” (The White House 2007a), as he made clear during his visit to Washington, and to boost Japan’s ability to act on the international stage. Aiming at Japan’s emergence as a “normal” power and increased burden sharing with the US, Abe is in strong favour of collective self-defence. In line with this objective, Abe has advocated a revision of the constitution – a goal Washington has long been pushing for, as the constitution restricts Japan’s role in the alliance (Ackerman/Kawagishi 2007; Nishihara 2007). Thus far, Abe has put through parliament the national referendum law, which constitutes procedures for a referendum, a necessary step on the way to the constitutional revision (NNI, 22/10/07). Another step in the direction of a more active Japanese security role is the transformation of the Japan Defence Agency into the Ministry of Defence, which was implemented in January 2007 (cf. Sakaeda 2007a). Underlying these measures is the conviction that, as Bush remarked at the 2006 APEC meeting in Hanoi, “strengthening our alliance would be a good in maintaining peace and security of not just Japan and the region surrounding Japan, but the entire world” (The White House 2006). Overall, Abe has proved to be a loyal (although more self-confident) ally to the US, carrying forward Koizumi’s disputed policies of Japanese participation in the GWOT and the realignment of US forces on Japanese territory (J.A., 3/2007: 103-105; McCormack 2007). Abe even tied his premiership to an extension of the ATSMML, necessary for a continuation of the SDF’s refuelling mission in the Indian Ocean, when facing fierce opposition by the Democratic Party of Japan (ST, 10/9/07). His close connection to Washington cannot, however, be explained solely by the shared values that Abe emphasizes. The changing regional environment (most notably the North Korean threat and the rise of China) plays a crucial role in Japan’s shifting security policy, including the alliance with the United States.

Although Abe has overall worked to further deepen bilateral relationship with the US, his remark in March 2007 about the “comfort women” not having been forced into sex slavery has had a negative effect on US-Japanese ties. Despite his apology, shortly after the lost upper house election in July 2007, the US House of Representatives issued a symbolic resolution calling for Tokyo to apologize for the “comfort women” issue (JT, 31/7/07). This had been triggered by an advertisement published in the *Washington Post*, in which 44 individuals, among them Japanese parliamentarians, had claimed that there was no evidence that women had been forced into prostitution (J.A., 4/2007: 117-119). In

combination with Japan's portraying itself as a victim in the abduction issue, Tokyo is often perceived as hypocritical in US policy circles. Furthermore, when former Defence Minister Fumio Kyūma remarked that the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki "couldn't be helped", he set off another controversy. The subsequent insistence of US Undersecretary of State Robert Joseph on the legitimacy of the bombings triggered harsh criticism in Japan. With differences over how to handle the North Korean issue, Tokyo's decreasing of US-focused personnel and the ebbing of business leaders willing to contribute to the promotion of US-Japanese exchanges, fears of the alliance hollowing out have increasingly been voiced in the media (NNI, 17/9/07). However, the two statesmen have continued to emphasize their countries' and close personal ties (The White House 2007b).

### **The Road Ahead: Fukuda's Pragmatic Approach to Foreign Policy**

Abe's foreign policy presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, despite his reputation as an ultranationalist and his announcement to work for the abolishment of the "post-war regime" prior to assuming office, Abe proved to be rather pragmatic in foreign relations (Katz/Ennis 2007), most notably in his treatment of the Yasukuni issue. Abe's most significant achievement in Japan's foreign relations was his successful policy of détente towards China and South Korea. Due to Abe's efforts, the Yasukuni issue has decreased in importance, which opens up the possibility of a lasting improvement of Japan's relations with its neighbours. Like his predecessor, he put emphasis on the deepening of the US-Japan alliance, and he worked to build strategic relations with other democracies in the region like India and Australia. Furthermore, although critical scholars saw Abe as an inexperienced prime minister in a "rush to overturn six decades of official pacifism" (Ackerman/Kawagishi 2007), he (like Koizumi) merely reflected Japan's ongoing metamorphosis towards a more active role in international politics (Katz/Ennis 2007). His more assertive foreign policy did not mark a radical re-orientation towards becoming a great military power but simply an "updated version of the Yoshida Doctrine" (Mochizuki 2007a: 195), that is, Japan's post-war policy, introduced by Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, of pursuing economic recovery while relying militarily on the US. On the other hand, Abe's awkward handling of the "comfort women" issue not only aroused criticism from China and South Korea but also continues to pose differences

with the US. As Richard Samuels stresses, “Japan’s unwillingness or inability to confront its history squarely is undoubtedly the largest single constraint on its diplomacy” (Samuels 2006: 121). Furthermore, Abe’s tough stance on North Korea, in particular his insistence on the abduction issue being discussed at the six-party talks, hampered his ability to influence the negotiations on the North Korean nuclear program.

In the immediate aftermath of Abe’s resignation it first seemed that LDP Secretary-General and former Minister for Foreign Affairs Tarō Asō would succeed Abe (Köllner 2007), but instead former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda prevailed. Asō had been foreign minister in the Abe cabinet, and due to the widespread disappointment with the Abe administration, Asō stood no real chance to succeed him (J.A., 5/2007: 101-102). Fukuda is considered to be a moderate politician, willing to compromise (*ibid.*). Also in matters of foreign policy, he stands for a very pragmatic approach (Tanaka 2007). Already during the run-up to succeed Koizumi, during which he competed against Abe, Fukuda rested his claim mainly on the restoration of friendly ties with Beijing and Seoul (Jiang 2007). He called for intensified economic cooperation with China and South Korea to achieve a further integration of the region and opposed Abe’s plan to revise the constitution, anxious to alarm Japan’s neighbours. Furthermore, Fukuda clearly opposed Koizumi’s visits to the Yasukuni shrine and warned that they could lead to Japan’s isolation in Asia (Tanaka 2007). Thus, Fukuda is likely to continue Abe’s policy of *détente* towards China and South Korea (Klingner 2007). One such step presents Fukuda’s agreement with Chinese Ambassador to Japan Cui Tiankai to search for a settlement of the bilateral dispute over the gas fields in the East China Sea (Kyodo, 5/11/07, in: BBC-Email, 5/11/07). Fukuda has furthermore continued to keep a rather tough stance on the abduction issue. This became clear through the fact that, despite a breakthrough in the six-party talks, Tokyo has further extended the sanctions against North Korea (cf. Johannes Gerschewski’s article in these pages).

The new Prime Minister is also likely to push for increased US-Japan relations. Fukuda, like Abe, was instrumental in bringing about Japan’s participation in the GWOT (Green 2006). However, Fukuda is “rooted in the LDP’s more pacifist traditions” (Glosserman 2007) and thus less likely to push for a removal of legal restrictions on the use of force (Klingner 2007). Furthermore, the US-Japan alliance has been complicated by the fact that, due to the DPJ’s opposition, the SDF’s refuelling mission was terminated because the ATSMML could not

be extended. In order to get the ATSMML accepted, Fukuda has even offered DPJ leader Ichirō Ozawa to join the LDP in a grand coalition. Ozawa faced fierce opposition from within the DPJ for not having turned down the offer immediately (NNI, 5/11/07). According to the Japanese Ambassador to the United States Ryōzō Katō, the failure to push through with the ATSMML has left US-Japan relations “the most difficult and delicate” in years (Kyodo, 4/11/07, in: BBC-Email, 6/11/07).

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